

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PORT LOUIS 1133

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT MP
SUBJECT: MAURITIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: POST ELECTORAL
ROUND-UP: DECEMBER 27

REF: PORT LOUIS 1129

SUMMARY: CONSULTATIONS AMONG THE LEADERS OF THE LABOR PARTY
AND THE MAURITIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PMSD) OVER FORMATION
OF A NEW GOVERNMENT CONTINUED THROUGHOUT THE WEEKEND. A
FINAL DECISION HAD STILL NOT BEEN TAKEN AS OF MORNING 27
DECEMBER. PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM WAS TO ANNOUNCE HIS
PLANS AT A MID-DAY PRES CONFERENCE. THE MEMBERS OF THE
NEW LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ARE TO BE SWORN IN AT NOON ON
DECEMBER 28. PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM MUST COME UP WITH A
PLAN FOR FORMING THE GOVERNMENT BY THAT TIME. THE EIGHT
"BEST LOSER" SEATS WERE AWARDED AS EXPECTED, FOUR TO THE
MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM), THREE TO THE INDEPENDENCE
PARTY (IP) AND ONE TO THE PMSD. THE STRENGTHS OF THE PARTIES
IN THE ASSEMBLY STAND AS FOLLOWS:
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MMM 34 SEATS
IP 28 SEATS
PMSD 8 SEATS
SPECULATION IS RIFE THAT IN VIEW OF THE INSTABILITY OF
WHATEVER GOVERNMENT RAMGOOLAM IS ABLE TO PUT TOGETHER,
NEW ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD SOON. END SUMMARY

1. THE EIGHT "BEST LOSER" SEATS AWARDED BY THE ELECTORAL SUPERVISORY COMMISSION ON DECEMBER 24 WERE DIVIDED AS FOLLOWS: FOUR TO THE MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM), THREE TO THE INDEPENDENCE PARTY (IP) AND ONE TO THE MAURITIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PMSD). BY ETHNIC COMMUNITY THEY WERE DIVIDED INTO FIVE FOR THE "GENERAL POPULATION", AND THREE TO MUSLIM CANDIDATES. NO ADDITIONAL SEAT WAS AWARDED TO THE CHINESE COMMUNITY, WHICH LEAVES THIS GROUP DECIDEDLY UNDER-REPRESENTED. PROMINENT AMONG THE "BEST LOSER" SEAT RECIPIENTS WERE FOREIGN MINISTER SIR HAROLD WALTER OF THE IP AND YOUSUF MOHAMED, SON OF THE DEFEATED LEADER OF THE MUSLIM COMMITTEE FOR ACTION. THE FINAL DIVISION OF THE 70 SEATS IN THE ASSEMBLY IS AS ANTICIPATED: 34 MMM, 28 IP AND 8 PMSD. THE ALLOCATION OF "BEST LOSER" SEATS ILLUSTRATED THE PECULIAR WORKINGS OF THE MAURITIAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM. THE MMM, WHICH WAS HUGELY

SUPPORTED BY THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY, RECEIVED THREE GENERAL POPULATION AND ONE MUSLIM "BEST LOSER" SEATS. LABOR, A LARGELY HINDU PARTY, RECEIVED TWO GENERAL POPULATION AND ONE MUSLIM SEATS. THE PMSD, WHICH IS MAINLY SUPPORTED BY THE GENERAL POPULATION, RECEIVED A MUSLIM SEAT.

2. PROLONGED CONSULTATIONS CONTINUED THROUGHOUT THE WEEKEND AMONG THE LEADERS OF THE LABOR PARTY AND THE PMSD, WHICH SHOULD RESULT IN THE FORMATION OF EITHER A COALITION GOVERNMENT MADE UP OF THESE TWO PARTIES OR A MINORITY LABOR GOVERNMENT SUPPORTED IN THE ASSEMBLY BY THE VOTES OF THE 8 PMSD MEMBERS. IN EITHER CASE PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL

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EXTREMELY FRAGILE, AS IT WILL BE MADE UP OF ONLY 36 SEATS AGAINST THE 34 HELD BY THE MMM. THE QUESTION OF WHAT SORT OF GOVERNMENT RAMGOOLAM WILL BE ABLE TO PUT TOGETHER REMAINS UNRESOLVED AS OF THE MORNING OF DECEMBER 27. RAMGOOLAM HAD TO POSTPONE A PRESS CONFERENCE SCHEDULED FOR DECEMBER 24, AND HE IS NOW SUPPOSED TO ANNOUNCE HIS PLANS FOR A NEW GOVERNMENT AT MID-DAY ON DECEMBER 27. THE NEW ASSEMBLY WILL BE SWORN IN AT NOON ON DECEMBER 28, WHICH IS OBVIOUSLY RAMGOOLAM'S DEADLINE FOR FORMING A GOVERNMENT.

3. IT IS APPARENT THAT THE PMSD IS WILLING TO JOIN THE LABOR PARTY IN A COALITION GOVERNMENT, BUT ITS TERMS FOR DOING SO APPEAR TO BE UNACCEPTABLE TO AT LEAST ONE FACTION OF THE LABOR PARTY. THE PMSD HAS BEEN DEMANDING A CERTAIN NUMBER OF MINISTRIES AND OTHER KEY GOVERNMENT POSTS, WHICH SOME IN THE LABOR PARTY ARE UNWILLING TO GIVE UP. IF THE PMSD'S TERMS FOR JOINING THE GOVERNMENT ARE REJECTED IN THE END, IT IS BELIEVED THAT THE PMSD WILL BE WILLING TO VOTE

FOR THE INSTALLATION OF A MINORITY LABOR GOVERNMENT IN
ORDER TO BAR THE WAY TO THE MMM.

4. THERE HAS BEEN SPECULATION IN THE PRESS THA PMSD LEADER
GAETAN DUVAL WAS TO BE MADE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL IN A COALITION
GOVERNMENT, BUT THIS NOW SEEMS DOUBTFUL. ONE POSSIBILITY
IS THAT THIS POST WILL GO TO A DEFEATED CHINESE PMSD CANDIDATE,
TO MAKE UP FOR THE FAILURE OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY TO
RECEIVE TWO SEATS IN THE ASSEMBLY. THE MMM HAS EXPRESSED
HOSTILITY TO THE IDEA OF DUVAL BECOMING ATTORNEY GENERAL
AND HAS CALLED THIS IDEA AN "EXTREME PROVOCATION" TO THE
VOTERS WHO OUSTED HIM.

5. OF THE 70 ASSEMBLY MEMBERS TO BE SWORN IN TOMORROW,
ONLY 13 WERE MEMBERS OF THE LAST ASSEMBLY. THIS IS AN
INDICATION OF THE OVERWHELMING ANTI-INCUMBENT SPITIT DISPLAYED
BY THE VOTERS ON DECEMBER 20. THE PRESS POINTS OUT THAT
A LABOR-PMSD COALITION WOULD HAVE ONLY FOUR BACK-BENCHERS,
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SINCE THERE WOULD BE 21 MINISTERS, 10 PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES
AND ONE DEPUTY SPEAKER AMONG THE 36 MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY
MAJORITY. IT IS BELIEVED THAT THIS SITUATION WOULD MAKE
DEFLECTIONS TO THE MMM UNLIKELY.

6. THE MMM CONTINUES ITS VOCIFEROUS OPPOSITION TO A LABOR-
PMSD COALITION. IT INSISTS THAT IT WISHES TO FORM THE
GOVERNMENT ITSELF. IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE NEWSPAPER
WEEK-END, MMM PRESIDENT JUGNAUTH SAID THAT HIS PARTY WILL
TRY TO PUSH THE LABOR PARTY TO THE LEFT. JUGNAUTH BELIEVES
THAT NEW ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD SHORTLY. OTHER PAPERS
PREDICT THAT THE MMM WILL ATTEMPT TO ENGINEER A VOTE OF NO
CONFIDENCE IN A LABOR GOVERNMENT AT THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY
IN ORDER TO BRING ABOUT NEW ELECTIONS. IT IS POINTED OUT
THAT IN ORDER TO PREVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING IT WILL BE ALMOST
IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANY MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT TO LEAVE THE
COUNTRY.

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7. THE MMM NEWSPAPER HAS ANNOUNCED THAT THE PARTY WILL MOUNT A CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE MAURITIUS BROADCASTING CORPORATION BECAUSE IT HAS CONTINUED TO DISCRIMINATE AGAINST THE PARTY DESPITE ITS ELECTORAL VICTORY. WHAT ANNOYED THE MMM WAS THE CANCELLATION OF AN INTERVIEW WITH JUGNAUTH AND BERENGER "FOR TECHNICAL REASONS". THE PRO-LABOR NEWSPAPER THE NATION MEANWHILE ACCUSES THE MBC OF HAVING GIVEN ITS LISTENERS AND VIEWERS A STRONG DOSE OF COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA IN THE TEN DAYS FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS BECAUSE THE MBC STAFF WISHED TO CURRY FAVOR WITH THE VICTORIOUS MMM.

8. MOST OF THE ELECTORAL POST-MORTEM FOCUS ON THE CONTINUING STRENGTH OF COMMUNAL VOTING HABITS IN THE MAURITIAN POPULATION. THE NATION (PRO-LABOR) SAYS THAT COMMUNALISM DOMINATED THE ELECTIONS AND IT DEPLORED THIS SITUATION. THE PAPER CLAIMS THAT MUSLIMS WHO WERE PRO-MMM REFUSED TO VOTE FOR PARTY LEADERS BERENGER AND JUGNAUTH IN THE HOPE THAT THEIR DEFEAT WOULD MAKE KADER BHAYAT, THE MUSLIM VICE PRESIDENT OF THE PARTY, ITS LEADER IN PARLIAMENT. JUGNAUTH OF THE MMM ADMITTED IN AN INTERVIEW THAT THE MMM HAD TAKEN COMMUNALISM
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INTO ACCOUNT IN CHOOSING ITS CANDIDATES. HE SAID HIS PARTY REGRETS THAT COMMUNALISM PLAYS SUCH AN IMPORTANT ROLE AND WILL TRY TO EDUCATE THE VOTERS AGAINST THE HABIT. THE PRO-LABOR PRESS ARGUES THAT PEOPLE DID NOT VOTE AGAINST THE LABOR PARTY BUT RATHER AGAINST INDIVIDUAL LABOR CANDIDATES, AS DEMONSTRATED BY THE FACT THAT LABOR MEN LED THE FIELD IN SEVERAL DISTRICTS WHERE THEIR RUNNING MATES WENT DOWN TO DEFEAT. SEVERAL PAPERS HAVE FEATURES ON WINNING MMM CANDIDATE SURESH MOORBA, WHO DEFEATED DUVAL IN DISTRICT NUMBER 4, DESPITE THE FACT THAT HE WAS GIVEN NO HELP BY THE MMM AFTER HE TOOK ON WHAT SEEMED A HOPELESS TASK WHICH NO ONE ELSE IN THE MMM WANTED. DEV VIRAHSAWAMY, DEFEATED LEADER

OF THE MMMSP, HAS ANSWERED CHARGES BY BERENGER THAT THE MMMSP HURT THE MMM IN THE ELECTION. HE POINTS OUT THAT THE MMM LOST CLOSE RACES IN A NUMBER OF DISTRICTS WHERE THE MMMSP PRESENTED NO CANDIDATES. HE REMINDED BERENGER THAT ONLY TWO-FIFTHS OF THE ELECTORATE VOTED FOR THE MMM, MEANING THAT THREE-FIFTHS ARE AGAINST HIS PARTY.

9. WEEK-END SAYS THAT IN NEW ELECTIONS, A LABOR-PMSD COALITION WOULD NOT HAVE AS EASY A TIME DEFEATING THE MMM AS SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE. (COMMENT: IT IS SOMEWHAT NAIVE OF THE PARTISANS OF A LABOR-PMSD COALITION TO BELIEVE THAT THEY WOULD WIN EASILY AGAINST THE MMM IF THEY WORKED TOGETHER. WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT TOGETHER THE IP AND THE PMSD POLLED 54 PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE AS AGAINST 40 PERCENT FOR THE MMM, IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT 63 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE VOTED FOR CHANGE, THAT IS, AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT IN POWER REPRESENTED BY THE INDEPENDENCE PARTY. FURTHERMORE, MANY FOLLOWERS OF BOTH LABOR AND OF THE PMSD WOULD RATHER VOTE FOR THE MMM IF THEIR OWN PARTY WAS ABSENT FROM THE DISTRICT BECAUSE OF A COALITION "DEAL.")

10. IN ITS DECEMBER 26 EDITION THE NEWSPAPER WEEK-END BRAGS ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE OF ITS PUBLIC OPINION POLL. THERE IS NO DENYING THAT IT CORRECTLY FORECAST A MMM VICTORY. THOUGH CONFIDENTIAL

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IT CAME CLOSER TO THE ACTUAL RESULT THAN MOST PEOPLE WERE PREPARED TO ACCEPT BEFORE ELECTION DAY, THE POLL DID NOT DO AS WELL AS CLAIMED. ITS PREDICTIONS FOR THE MMM AND IP POPULAR VOTE WERE BEYOND THE MARGINS OF ERROR IT ALLOWED ITSELF, THOUGH NOT BY MUCH. WEEK-END CLAIMED ITS POLL HAD CORRECTLY PICKED THE WINNING PARTY IN 12 OF THE 19 ELECTORAL DISTRICTS IT POLLED, BUT THE MARGINS OF ERROR WERE SO LARGE IN FOUR OF THESE DISTRICTS THAT IT COULD NOT LEGITIMATELY CLAIM ACCURACY. WHAT THE POLL HAD SPOTTED CORRECTLY WAS THE WEAKNESS OF THE PMSD. IT ALSO CORRECTLY FORECAST THE DEFEAT OF MANY PARTY LEADERS AND INCUMBENT CANDIDATES OF ALL PARTIES.

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